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A KING OF JUDAH AND OTHER MEDIAEVAL SCULPTURES

THE year 1140, which saw the completion of the sculptured portal of the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis, marks the beginning of a new stage in the evolution of European sculpture—the emergence of the Gothic style in the Royal Domain of France. Nothing remains, unfortunately, of the figure sculptures representing ancestors of Christ, according to the flesh, which Abbot Suger had carved on the west portal of Saint-Denis, but those of the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral, dating only a few years later (sometime between 1145-60), and possibly by the same men who had worked at Saint-Denis, stand us in good stead. With the sculptures of Chartres before us, we are able to vitalize the feeble drawings made for Montfauçon of the Saint-Denis statues before they were destroyed, and thus to form some adequate idea of the original appearance of this celebrated monument which exerted so far-reaching an influence not only upon architecture, but also upon the development of French sculpture.

Two characteristics stand out conspicuously: one the use of column-statues, that is to say, of statues addorsed to columns, flanking the church doors—a form of sculpture which apparently had its origin in Lombardy rather than France; and secondly, a fact of infinitely greater importance, a new quality of naturalness, which represents an emphatic departure from the Romanesque style, at this time in full florescence. During the five centuries, roughly speaking, which followed the downfall of ancient civilization, monumental sculpture was practically non-existent in France. Even when it begins to play a part of some importance in the later years of the eleventh and early in the twelfth century, it is still marked with technical inexpertness and dependence on such models as manuscript illuminations and the minor sculpture of the ivory-carver. The Romanesque sculptor came into contact with nature chiefly as it was presented to him in the schematic formulae of the Byzantine painter and carver, with here and there an occasional survival of some debased form of late Roman art. Even the fully developed Romanesque sculpture is aloof from life, despite increased technical facility and the furious, choreatic movement which animates the work of certain schools. Romanesque sculpture has been compared to dried herbs found between the leaves of ancient books. In contrast, such sculptures as the Kings and Queens at Chartres—monuments which announce the resurrection of sculpture through the imitation of nature—may be likened to the fresh shoots of a young and vigorous plant soon to blossom into the full beauty of the Gothic age. It is this vernal quality, this freshness of inspiration, which gives such enduring interest to the mid-twelfth century sculpture of Chartres and, among others, to the analogous portals, dating somewhat later in the second half of the twelfth century, of Le Mans, Senlis, Vermanton, Bourges, Etampes, and Saint-Loup de Naud.

There is exhibited this month in the Room of Recent Accessions, a stone column-statue (fig. 1) representing a King, presumably one of the Kings of Judah in the genealogy of Christ as related by Saint Matthew. This important sculpture, purchased from the Pulitzer Fund, may be dated about the middle of the twelfth century, and is closely related in style to certain of the celebrated statues of Kings and Queens on the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral. It, too, formed part, in all probability, of the decoration of some portal—but one of less majestic proportions than that of Chartres—since our King is less, rather than over, life-size.[1] The provenance of the statue, unfortunately, is unknown. Although this information would add to its archaeological value, the rarity and exceptional beauty of this remarkable example of the Chartres school of mid-twelfth century sculpture are sufficient cause for congratulation.

The figure has suffered considerable mutilation. The nose and part of the beard have been destroyed and both hands broken off. Only a part of the scroll,

[1] Height, 46 inches.



FIG. I. A KING OF JUDAH
STONE COLUMN-STATUE FROM THE PORTAL OF A CHURCH
FRENCH, MIDDLE OF XII CENTURY

which was held in the right hand, still remains. The left hand held a sceptre, to judge from the trace which may be seen on the left breast. The king wears a long tunic, or *chainse,* and over this a *bliaud;* over the shoulders an arms is draped a long mantle. A wide belt confines the bliaud at the waist. Two ends of a long girdle hang down below the knees. The large collar of the bliaud, the borders of the sleeves and the mantle, the hem of the tunic, and the shoes are ornamented. The king is bearded and has long hair falling to the shoulders. He wears a crown carved to represent rich jewel work, and behind the head is a halo with an ornamented border.

The elongation of the figure is in perfect accord with the purpose which this column-statue served. One has only to look at the slender figures ranged in front of the columns of the west portal of Chartres to realize how successfully figure sculptures of this type were adapted to the architectural scheme. The long parallel folds of the drapery of our King are in harmony with the slender proportions of the figure and emphasize the architectural character of the sculpture: one should visualize the column, of which the sculpture forms a part, extending somewhat above the figure and surmounted by a capital; below, there would be an ornamented support for the figure and a pedestal or continuation of the shaft. The vertical lines of the tunic are varied by the horizontal folds of the bliaud over the abdomen, by the rhythmic fan-wise folds of the mantle over the shoulders, and the zigzag fall at the sides. The sharp, angular treatment of the border of the tunic as it falls over the feet makes an effective contrast to the delicate fluting of the drapery, and, so to speak, starts the figure with a strong "interest," balancing the elaboration of the upper part of the statue. Although the figure is intentionally designed to echo the cylindrical form of the column of which it forms a part, at the same time the sculptor has skilfully avoided monotony by suggesting, through means of the arms, the sceptre, and the scroll, various curving lines which cross at the middle of the body, and offer an agreeable relief to the general vertical lines of the statue.

In this refinement of design the old decorative tradition of Romanesque sculpture evinces itself; the new qualities—which announce a new age—are naturalism and characterization. Unquestionably, the sculptor has observed nature and endeavored to record his own visual experiences. True, he only partly succeeded; first, because he modified the proportions of the human body in the interest of the general design in which this column-statue had its place; and secondly, because his way of working was still encumbered with traditional recipes. Granting all this, there still persists an impression of naturalness which is convincing. To this is added something very difficult to define—but nevertheless unmistakable—a successful attempt to express individuality. Like his royal brethren at Chartres, our King is a great personage, one worthy to stand in the cohort of nobles at the entrance to the House of God.

Another notable example of early French sculpture, recently purchased, is also shown this month in the same room as the column-statue. This piece is a stone capital,[1] sculptured on its four sides with scenes from the Temptation of Christ. Unfortunately the provenance of the sculpture again is unknown. It may be confidently attributed, however, to the Ile-de-France School of the late twelfth century. In the first (fig. 2, lower view, right) of the four scenes, Jesus, having retired into the wilderness to fast, is tempted by the Devil who points to food and drink. In the second (fig. 2, lower view, left), the Devil indicates a pile of stones, saying. . . . "if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." In the following scene (fig. 2, upper left), the Devil carries Jesus upon his back: two interpretations of this scene are possible—the flight to the "exceeding high mountain" where the Devil showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," or, the flight to the Holy City, where the Devil set Jesus upon the pinnacle of the Temple, and mocked Him. . . . "if

[1] Height, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches; width at top, $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." This is obviously the subject of the fourth and last scene (fig. 2, upper right), where Jesus is represented standing on the sloping roof of a tiny edifice symbolizing the Temple.

In the representation of these incidents of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the scenes are reduced to their simplest

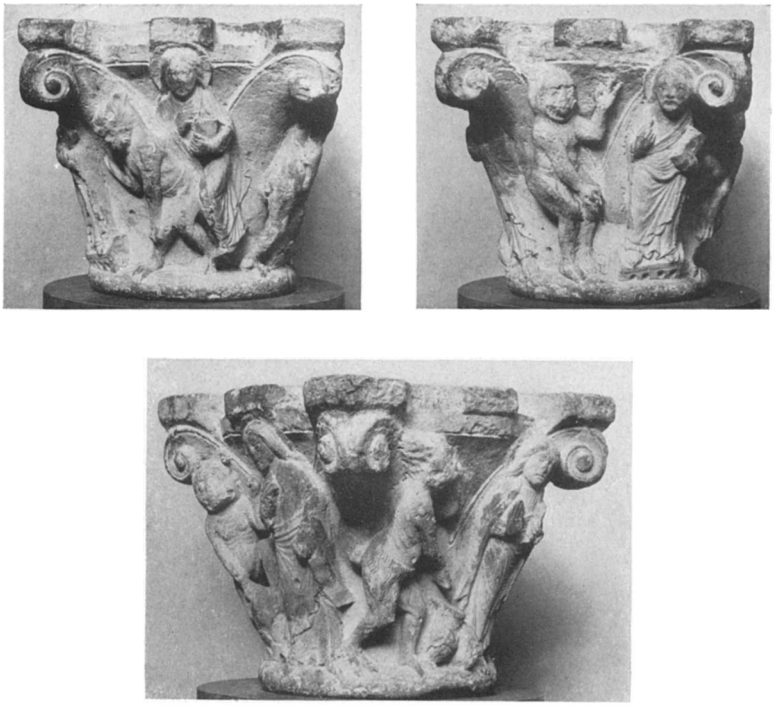


FIG. 2. STONE CAPITAL, FRENCH, LATE XII CENTURY WITH SCENES FROM CHRIST'S TEMPTATION

elements, but gain thereby in dramatic effect. Particularly striking is the contrast between the quiet, dignified figure of our Lord and the grimaces and violent postures of the Devil. This increased power of characterization—when contrasted with the earlier attempts of Romanesque sculpture—is paralleled by increased skill in representation. The drapery falls in natural folds and the attitudes and movements show observation of life. On the other hand, there is a fine feeling for decoration which is manifested in the successful adaptation of the figure reliefs to the form of the capital.

The extraordinary progress which French sculpture made in the second half of the twelfth century is readily apparent when one turns from the sculptures just discussed to examine the two stone capitals[1] from engaged columns (fig. 3), which are also shown among the new purchases in the Room of Recent Accessions. The exact provenance of these capitals is unknown; they are said to have come from somewhere on the border line between France and Spain. They are probably South French, and the archaic character of the sculpture would indicate a fairly early date, presumably late eleventh, or possibly early twelfth century. On the front of one of the capitals is a centaur with a bow and arrow; on the right, a standing figure of a man, similarly armed; and

[1] Height 19½ inches; width 20¾ inches: height 16¼ inches; width 19½ inches.

on the left, a lion and foliage. On the other capital, corresponding to the centaur, is represented a combat between a man and a lion (possibly Samson and the lion, although no precise meaning may have been intended). To the left is a man holding a mace, and on the right, a man twisting the lion's tail. The costumes are interesting; the "grooved" garments may represent chain-mail, although, more probably, this is merely an inexpert way of representing thin folds of drapery. The form of the boots may be clearly seen.

Such capitals as these afforded the early Romanesque sculptor his principal field for monumental sculpture, and generally the results are admirable as decoration. The finest examples go further: despite the crudity of the work and the archaic conventions which were inevitable in this stage of the development of mediæval sculpture, there is recognizable—and this is true of our capitals—a tremendous vitality and an instinctive feeling for form which prepare us for the culmination of this early period in the School of Chartres.

Two other pieces of stone sculpture recently purchased and exhibited this month among the new accessions, remain to be mentioned. These are fragments of a South Italian, twelfth-century stone frieze, which, joined together, measure 71½ inches in length by 11½ inches in height. The relief may have formed the lintel of a door or part of an ambo; it is said to have come from the Abruzzi. A scroll forms seven circular fields, in four of which are foliated motives; in two, seated figures of men; and in one, an animal, perhaps a deer. This relief, although somewhat battered, is an excellent example of the decorative sculpture of the Romanesque period, showing oriental influences in the design as well as in the technique. J. B.



FIG. 3. STONE CAPITALS, FRENCH, END OF XI CENTURY